

Republican members of Congress but also the Electronic Frontier<sup>SUBSCRIBE</sup> Foundation and the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press.

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When the judge in the case nonetheless rejected Defense Distributed's request for a preliminary injunction that would have immediately allowed it to continue publishing gun files, the company appealed, and lost. But as the case proceeded toward a ruling on Defense Distributed's first amendment argument, the government surprised the plaintiffs by suddenly offering them a settlement with essentially everything they wanted. It even pays back \$40,000 of their court costs and paperwork fees. (Wilson says that's still only about 10 percent of the \$400,000 that the plaintiffs spent.)

Goldstein says the settlement may have had as much to do with ITAR reforms begun during the Obama administration as with the gun-friendly Trump administration that took over the case. But he doesn't rule out that a new regime may have helped tip the balance in the plaintiffs' favor. "There's different management at the helm of this agency," Goldstein says. "You can draw your own conclusions." Both the Department of Justice and the State Department declined to comment on the outcome of the case.

With the rule change their win entails, Defense Distributed has removed a legal threat to not only its project but an entire online community of DIY gunmakers. Sites like GrabCAD and FossCad already host hundreds of gun designs, from Defense Distributed's Liberator pistol to printable revolvers and even semiautomatic weapons. "There's a lot of satisfaction in doing things yourself, and it's also a way of expressing support for the Second Amendment," explains one prolific Fosscad contributor, a West Virginian serial inventor of 3-D-printable semiautomatics who goes by the pseudonym Derwood. "I'm a conservative. I support all the amendments."

But until now, Derwood and practically every other participant on those platforms risked prosecution for violating export controls, whether they knew it or not. Though enforcement has been rare against anyone less vocal and visible than Wilson, many online gunsmiths have nonetheless obscured their identities for that reason. With the more open and intentional database of gun files that Defcad represents, Wilson believes he can create a collection of files that's both more comprehensive and more refined, with higher accuracy, more detailed models for every component, giving machinists all the data they need to make or remix them. "This is the stuff that's necessary for the creative work to come," Wilson says.

In all of this, Wilson sees history repeating itself: He points to the so-called Crypto Wars of the 1990s. After programmer Philip Zimmermann in 1991 released PGP, the world's first free encryption program that anyone could use to thwart surveillance, he too was threatened with an indictment for violating export restrictions. Encryption software was, at the time, treated as a munition and placed on the same prohibited export control list as guns and missiles. Only after a fellow cryptographer, Daniel Bernstein, sued the government with the same free-speech argument Wilson would use 20 years later did the government drop its investigation of Zimmermann and spare him from prison.

"This is a specter of the old thing again," Wilson says. "What we were actually fighting about in court was a core crypto-war problem." And following that analogy, Wilson argues, his legal win means gun blueprints can now spread as widely as encryption has since that earlier legal fight: After all, encryption has now grown from an underground curiosity to a commodity integrated into apps, browsers, and websites running on billions of computers and phones across the globe.

But Zimmermann takes issue with the analogy—on ethical if not legal grounds. This time, he points out, the First Amendment-protected data that was legally treated as a weapon actually *is* a weapon. "Encryption is

a defense technology with humanitarian uses," Zimmermann says.<sup>14</sup> "Guns are only used for killing."

"Arguing that they're the same because they're both made of bits isn't quite persuasive for me," Zimmermann says. "Bits can kill."

AFTER A TOUR of the machine shop, Wilson leads me away from the industrial roar of its milling machines, out the building's black-mirrored-glass doors and through a grassy patch to its back entrance. Inside is a far quieter scene: A large, high-ceilinged, dimly fluorescent-lit warehouse space filled with half a dozen rows of gray metal shelves, mostly covered in a seemingly random collection of books, from *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* to *Hunger Games*. He proudly points out that it includes the entire catalog of Penguin Classics and the entire Criterion Collection, close to 900 Blu-rays. This, he tells me, will be the library.

And why is Defense Distributed building a library? Wilson, who cites Baudrillard, Foucault, or Nietzsche at least once in practically any conversation, certainly doesn't mind the patina of erudition it lends to what is essentially a modern-day gun-running operation. But as usual, he has an ulterior motive: If he can get this room certified as an actual, official public library, he'll unlock another giant collection of existing firearm data. The US military maintains records of thousands of the specs for thousands of firearms in technical manuals, stored on reels and reels of microfiche cassettes. But only federally approved libraries can access them. By building a library, complete with an actual microfiche viewer in one corner, Wilson is angling to access the US military's entire public archive of gun data, which he eventually hopes to digitize and include on Defcad.com, too.

To exploit a technical loophole that gives him access to military weapons files, Cody Wilson is also [SUBSCRIBE](#) building a library. He proudly notes it will include the entire Criterion Collection on Blu-ray.

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"Ninety percent of the technical data is already out there. This is a huge part of our overall digital intake strategy," Wilson says. "Hipsters will come here and check out movies, independent of its actual purpose, which is a stargate for absorbing ancient army technical materials."

Browsing that movie collection, I nearly trip over something large and hard. I look down and find a granite tombstone with the words AMERICAN GUN CONTROL engraved on it. Wilson explains he has a plan to embed it in the dirt under a tree outside when he gets around to it. "It's maybe a little on the nose, but I think you get where I'm going with it," he says.

Wilson plans to bury this tombstone by his library's entrance. "It's maybe a little on the nose," he admits.

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Wilson's library will serve a more straightforward purpose, too: In one corner stands a server rack that will host Defcad's website and backend database. He doesn't trust any hosting company to hold his controversial files. And he likes the optics of storing his crown jewels in a library, should any reversal of his legal fortunes result in a raid. "If you want to come get it, you have to attack a library," he says.

On that subject, he has something else to show me. Wilson pulls out a small embroidered badge. It depicts a red, dismembered arm on a white background. The arm's hand grips a curved sword, with blood dripping from it. The symbol, Wilson explains, once flew on a flag above the Goliad Fort in South Texas. In Texas' revolution against Mexico in the 1830s,

Goliad's fort was taken by the Mexican government and became the site of a massacre of 400 American prisoners of war, one that's far less widely remembered than the Alamo.

Wilson recently ordered a full-size flag with the sword-wielding bloody arm. He wants to make it a new symbol for his group. His interest in the icon, he explains, dates back to the 2016 election, when he was convinced Hillary Clinton was set to become the president and lead a massive crackdown on firearms.

The flag of Goliad, which Wilson has adopted as a new symbol for his group. He suggests you interpret it as you will. MICHELLE GROSKOPF

If that happened, as Wilson tells it, he was ready to launch his Defcad repository, regardless of the outcome of his lawsuit, and then defend it in an armed standoff. "I'd call a militia out to defend the server, Bundy-style," Wilson says calmly, in the first overt mention of planned armed violence I've ever heard him make. "Our only option was to build an infrastructure where we had one final suicidal mission, where we dumped everything into the internet," Wilson says. "Goliad became an inspirational thing for me."

Now, of course, everything has changed. But Wilson says the Goliad flag still resonates with him. And what does that bloody arm symbol mean to him now, in the era where Donald Trump is president and the law has surrendered to his will? Wilson declines to say, explaining that he would rather leave the mystery of its abstraction intact and open to interpretation.

But it doesn't take a degree in semiotics to see how the Goliad flag suits Defense Distributed. It reads like the logical escalation of the NRA's "cold

dead hands” slogan of the last century. In fact, it may be the perfect symbol not just for Defense Distributed’s mission but for the country that produced it, where firearms result in tens of thousands of deaths a year—vastly more than any other developed nation in the world—yet groups like Wilson’s continue to make more progress in undermining gun control than lawmakers do in advancing it. It’s a flag that represents the essence of violent extremist ideology: An arm that, long after blood is spilled, refuses to let go. Instead, it only tightens its grip on its weapon, as a matter of principle, forever.

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Corrected 7/10/2018 2:30 EST to note that the first 3-D printed gun used .380-caliber ammunition, not .223-caliber.\*

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